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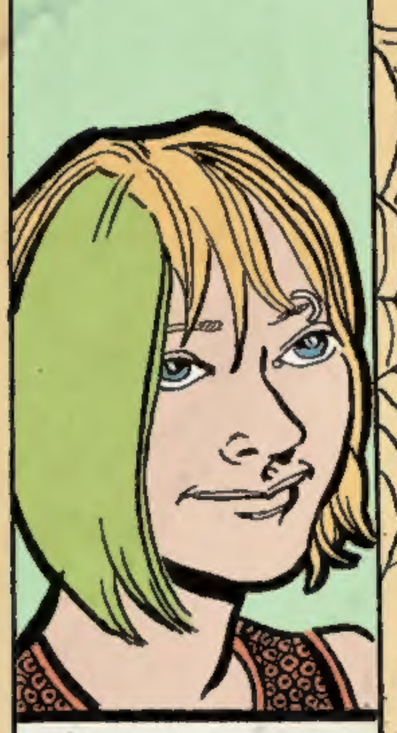

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the AMAZING LOCK&KEY

WHATEVER YOU DO!.... DON'T DIE BEFORE YOU CAN...

"KISS SOMEONE!"

LIT. NO "FEELIES".

DANG.

DAVE SIM 2-7 2013

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JOE HILL

GABRIEL RODRIGUEZ

JAY FOTOS

ALPHA

LOCKE & KEY

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Colors by: Jay Fotos • Letters by: Robbie Robbins • Edited by: Chris Ryall • Special thanks to Israel Skelton

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KNOCK KNOCK

WHO'S THERE?

ME. YOU READY, TYLER?

I'LL NEVER BE READY... BUT, YEAH. I'LL BE RIGHT OUT, KINSEY.

LET'S GET THIS OVER WITH.

BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS—NOW

IS SHE...

IN THERE.

HAS SHE...

DON'T KNOW. BUT UNCLE MACHEN WAS WITH HER FOR A WHILE. HE STANK LIKE GIN WHEN HE WENT IN AND HE SMELLED WORSE WHEN HE CAME OUT.

MOM?

UNH? YES? YES. I'M—

—I'M HERE. WHAT IS IT, KINSEY?

JUST WANTED TO CHECK ON YOU. SEE IF YOU WERE ALL RIGHT.

NO. WAIT.

THAT'S NOT TRUE.

I WANTED TO SAY IF YOU FEEL LIKE GETTING SMASHED, I DON'T BLAME YOU AND THERE'S NOTHING STOPPING YOU. IT DOESN'T MATTER ANYMORE.

YOU SHOULD HAVE WHAT YOU WANT.

I HAVEN'T BEEN DRINKING, KIDDO. WHAT I WANT IS THE PEOPLE I LOVE. ***CLOSE*** TO ME. AND THE DRINK JUST PUSHES EVERYONE AWAY.

I'VE ALREADY LOST ONE KID. I CAN'T LOSE MY LITTLE GIRL, TOO. OR TY. YOUR MOMMA NEEDS YOU BOTH.

STAY WITH ME. PLEASE. I DON'T WANT TO BE OUT THERE... BUT I DON'T WANT TO BE ALONE, EITHER.

REMEMBER WHEN DAD TOOK THIS PHOTO? BODE WAS COMPLAINING HOW HE WANTED TO GO TO PIZZA HUT, HE WANTED TO GO OUT TO LUNCH, HE WAS HUNGRY, HE WAS BORED, AND HE KEPT MAKING FACES AND—

—AND TYLER SAID IF BODE DIDN'T SETTLE DOWN AND SMILE HE WAS GOING TO FEED HIM HIS ASS—

AND BODE SAID—OH AH—AH HA! —BODE SAID—HE SAID—

—FFFF-F-F -FINALLY! SOMETHING TO EAT! AH—AH HA HA HA OH HAHAHAHA!

HOTEL

YOU GOT THAT BUSTED WINDOW REPLACED, DUNCAN?

YEAH. JUST PUT IT IN MYSELF. HEY, TURN AROUND AND GIVE ME YOUR BACK, WILL YOU?

WHAT'S THAT?

PINK SLIP ON THE CHARGER.

CAR IS YOURS. GRADUATION PRESENT.

ARE YOU FUCKING KIDDING ME?

WELL, WHY THE HELL DO YOU *THINK* I HAD YOU FIXING IT UP ALL SPRING? GO ON. TAKE IT OUT. IT'S A SWEET NIGHT FOR DRIVING.

I—I CAN'T—

THE HELL YOU CAN'T. BE SAFE IN IT. I'LL TELL YOUR MOM YOU'LL BE BACK IN AN HOUR OR TWO.

DON'T MAKE A LIAR OF ME AND PUT HER THROUGH ANY MORE STRESS.

Welcome To
LOVECRAFT
Massachusetts
Youre Home To Stay

WHO?

...

LUKE.
LUCAS DODGE
CARAVAGGIO.

BLAUGGGH!! PITTTHLLE!

THE FUCK? THIS WELL IS *FULL!* YOU WANNA FUCKING DROWN—

OH. *YOU.* YEAH. YOU PROBABLY *DO* WANT TO DROWN ME.

NOTHING PERSONAL. JUST KEEPING THE RESERVOIR FULL FOR THE TIME.

I WANT THE LOWER CAVES DRY. THERE'S SOMETHING DOWN THERE I NEED.

MMHM. THE *WHISP'RING IRON*. OF COURSE. YOU'RE JUST AS HOOKED ON THE KEYS AS YOUR OLD MAN. WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO MAKE FIRST? A KEY TO GIVE YOU AN EXTRA COCK?

AND WHY'D YOU BRING ME BACK? WHAT DO YOU *WANT* WITH ME?

I ALREADY TOLD YOU WHAT I WANT, LUKE. TO SAVE YOU.

I COULDN'T JUST LEAVE YOU DEAD LIKE YOU WERE. WITH THAT THING STILL IN CHARGE OF YOUR SOUL. IT KEEPS ITS HOOKS IN YOU EVEN AFTER DEATH, DOESN'T IT?

I *HATE* BEING DEAD. IT'S LIKE DROWNING. ONLY INSTEAD OF DROWNING IN WATER, IT'S LIKE DROWNING IN ALL THE EMOTIONS I NEVER WANTED TO FEEL.

I DON'T KNOW HOW DEAD PEOPLE LIVE THAT WAY.

GET IT? I DON'T KNOW HOW DEAD PEOPLE—AH, NEVER MIND.

ANYWAY. MAYBE YOU'LL FEEL DIFFERENTLY ABOUT IT. ABOUT BEING *DEAD*. WHY DON'T WE FIND OUT?

NNK. AAA. G-GUH-GOD. GOD.

THANK—

—THANK GOD.

OH. OH.

OH, TYLER. I *HURT* SO MANY PEOPLE. I HURT—I *DID*—TO ELLIE—TO *KINSEY*—MY FRIENDS—

IT WASN'T YOU.

IT *WAS*, THOUGH.

THAT'S THE WORST PART. IN SOME FUCKED UP WAY, IT *WAS*. IT DIDN'T *OVERRIDE* ME. IT REWIRED ME.

WHEN I KILLED ELLIE? THAT THING IN ME MADE SURE IT FELT *GOOD*. IT MADE ME LIKE IT. POOR ELLIE.

WHEN YOU'RE DEAD... ARE YOU ALONE? OR IS ELLIE OVER THERE, TOO? IN THE PLACE SPIRITS GO?

I GUESS SHE MUST BE, BUT FOR THE LITTLE WHILE I WAS DEAD I NEVER SAW HER. I NEVER SAW ANYONE. YOU EVER FIND A CAT SLEEPING IN A RAY OF SUN?

THERE'S A *SOUND* OVER THERE. IT'S A *GOLDEN* SOUND. THAT'S THE ONLY WAY TO DESCRIBE IT. IT'S A *BRIGHT* SOUND, AND IT HAS LITTLE FLECKS OF MUSIC IN IT, DRIFTING LIKE MOTES OF DUST.

AND YOU JUST KNOW IF YOU LET THAT SOUND GET INSIDE YOU, IF YOU HUMMED ALONG WITH IT, YOU'D REST LIKE A CAT IN THE SUN.

A PERFECT REST. YOU COULD REST A BILLION YEARS.

THE THING THAT WAS IN ME WAS AFRAID OF THE SOUND. I'D NEVER SEEN IT AFRAID BEFORE. IT FORCED ME TO STAY SILENT. IT MADE US STAY IN COLORLESS SILENCE UNTIL WE WERE CALLED BACK TO LIFE.

I'M NOT MAKING ANY SENSE, AM I?

NOT MUCH, BUT I DON'T MIND. SO I GUESS YOU DIDN'T SEE BODE, EITHER.

WHAT? *NO. NO!* I DUMPED HIS SOUL OUT OF HIS BODY, USING THE GHOST KEY.

HE WAS HAUNTING KEYHOUSE LAST I SAW HIM. TY, MAN. TY! YOU MUST'VE FIGURED THAT OUT. YOU'RE SMART! YOU'RE SO...

YEAH, I... I FIGURED. BUT THEY HAD ME SEDATED FOR TWO DAYS... LIKE, KINSEY AND ME BOTH. AND BY THE TIME EITHER OF US WAS CLEAR-HEADED AND BACK ON OUR FEET... HE WAS, YOU KNOW, CREMATED. LIKE MY DAD.

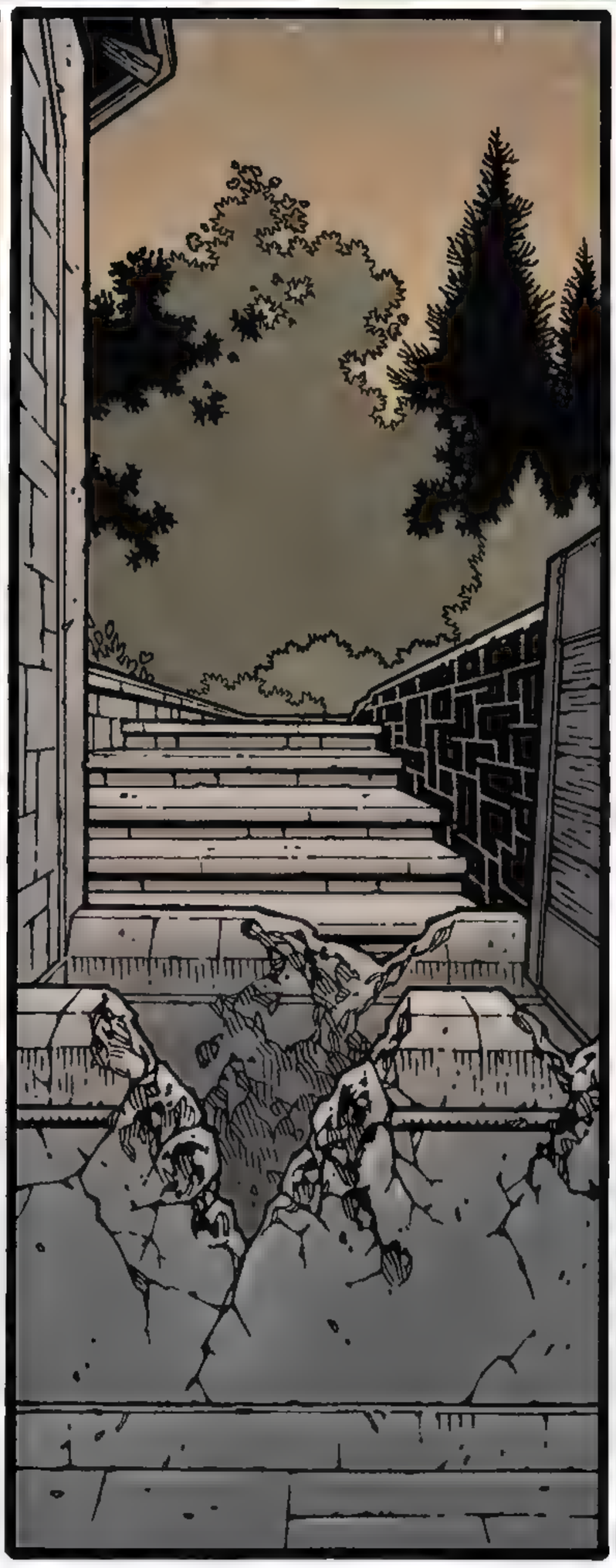
OH, GOD! OH, NO! OH, TYLER! I'M SORRY! I'M JUST SO FUCKING SORRY! BODE... WHERE'S HE GOING TO GO? IF HE'S GOT NO BODY TO COME BACK TO, WHERE'S HE GONNA GO? WHAT'LL HAPPEN—

SH. STOP. YOU AREN'T ANY MORE RESPONSIBLE FOR WHAT HAPPENED TO HIM THEN YOU'D BE IF HE WAS KILLED BY A CHILDHOOD CANCER. LET IT GO. TELL ME ABOUT THE MUSIC. TELL ME ABOUT THE FLOATING SPECKS OF MUSIC.

IT WON'T TAKE THAT LONG.

UH... I... I THINK THOSE ARE SOULS. I GUESS. MAYBE WHEN I GO OVER THERE THIS TIME I'LL PLAY THE SOUL KAZOO WITH ALL THE REST OF THEM.

MAYBE I'LL FIND ELLIE. THAT WOULDN'T BE SO BAD... TO HAVE ALL OF ETERNITY TO BEG HER TO FORGIVE ME.



WHAT THE HELL HAPPENED TO YOU? JUST GRIPPED BY A SUDDEN DESIRE TO GO SWIMMING WITH YOUR CLOTHES ON?

ACTUALLY, I WAS GRIPPED BY A SUDDEN DESIRE NOT TO *DROWN* WITH MY CLOTHES ON.

OH. WELL. I'M HERE. WHAT'S UP? WHAT'S THE BIG URGENT DEAL?

VISITING HOURS ARE OVER IN TEN MINUTES, BUT MS. VOSS DON'T HAVE MANY—

—YOUNG LADY, HAVE WE EVER MET?

I DON'T THINK SO.

ERIN? MS. VOSS? MY BROTHER FOUND SOME THINGS DOWN IN THE CAVE. THEY BELONG TO YOU.

WHITE. IT'S WHITE.

YEAH, THAT'S RIGHT, EVEN WITH A MAP ON YOUR PHONE, IT GETS PRETTY CONFUSING. IF YOU WANT TO GET BACK TO 128, THE EASIEST WAY IS TURN LEFT COMIN' OUT OF HERE...

...AND IF YOU GET TO A TRAFFIC CIRCLE? YOU DONE GONE TOO FAR...

UN-HUH. UN-HUH.

MS. VOSS? ERIN?

MY GOD. YOU HAVE EYES JUST LIKE YOUR FATHER'S. HIS EYES WERE THE EXACT SAME COLOR WHEN HE WAS HAPPY.

MS. VOSS! WHAT ARE YOU DOIN'? *WHERE* DO YOU THINK YOU ARE GOING?

OUT.

OUT? WHAT'CHU THINK IS OUTSIDE?

THE WHOLE REST OF MY LIFE.

UM.

BOY.

BEEN A LOT OF MEMORIALS LATELY. A HUNDRED AND SIX KIDS WENT DOWN IN THE CAVE TWO WEEKS AGO.

ONLY SIXTY-ONE CAME OUT. THEY'RE STILL TRYING TO FIGURE OUT WHY THE CAVE-IN HAPPENED OR WHY PEOPLE STARTED HALLUCINATING IN THE DARK, IF IT WAS METHANE GAS OR—

ANYWAY. SCOT KAVANAUGH LED MOST OF US OUT, EVEN THOUGH THE GAS OR WHATEVER WAS KILLING HIM. HE CARRIED OUT HIS BEST GIRL, JACKIE. THEY DIED HOLDING EACH OTHER.

JACKIE TAUGHT SCOT HOW TO BE GOOD.

YEAH. AND SCOT TAUGHT HER HOW TO BE BAD.

THEY WERE ONE HELL OF A PAIR.

MY FRIEND, SCOT—HE WORE HIS HEART ON HIS SKIN. RIGHT THERE FOR EVERYONE TO SEE. HE MADE ME WANT TO FEEL IT ALL. HE MADE ME WANT TO HAVE A HEART LIKE THAT.

JACKIE BROUGHT OUT THE BEST IN EVERYONE, BY MAKING YOU CARE. SHE MADE ME A BETTER RUNNER. SHE MADE ME A BETTER FRIEND.

I'LL SPEND THE REST OF MY LIFE TRYING TO CATCH UP TO HER.

I'D ASK YOU TO PUT YOUR HANDS TOGETHER FOR A PRAYER, BUT I THINK SCOT WOULD RATHER SEE SOME HORNS.

DOES ANYONE KNOW THE WORDS TO ANYTHING BY THE SEX PISTOLS? MAYBE WE COULD SING A SONG FOR 'EM.

ARE THEY SINGING "ANARCHY IN THE U.K."?

THEY ARE.

WHY, IN THE NAME OF GOD?

GOD DOESN'T COME INTO IT. MORE LIKE LUCIFER. HEY... IS THAT JORDAN'S MOTORCYCLE?

MY DAUGHTER DIDN'T OWN A MOTORCYCLE. THAT'S IN HER MOTHER'S NAME AND SHE WASN'T SUPPOSED TO RIDE IT. SHE DIDN'T EVEN HAVE A LICENSE.

DID YOU KNOW JORDAN?

I DON'T THINK ANYONE KNEW YOUR DAUGHTER, MR. GATES.

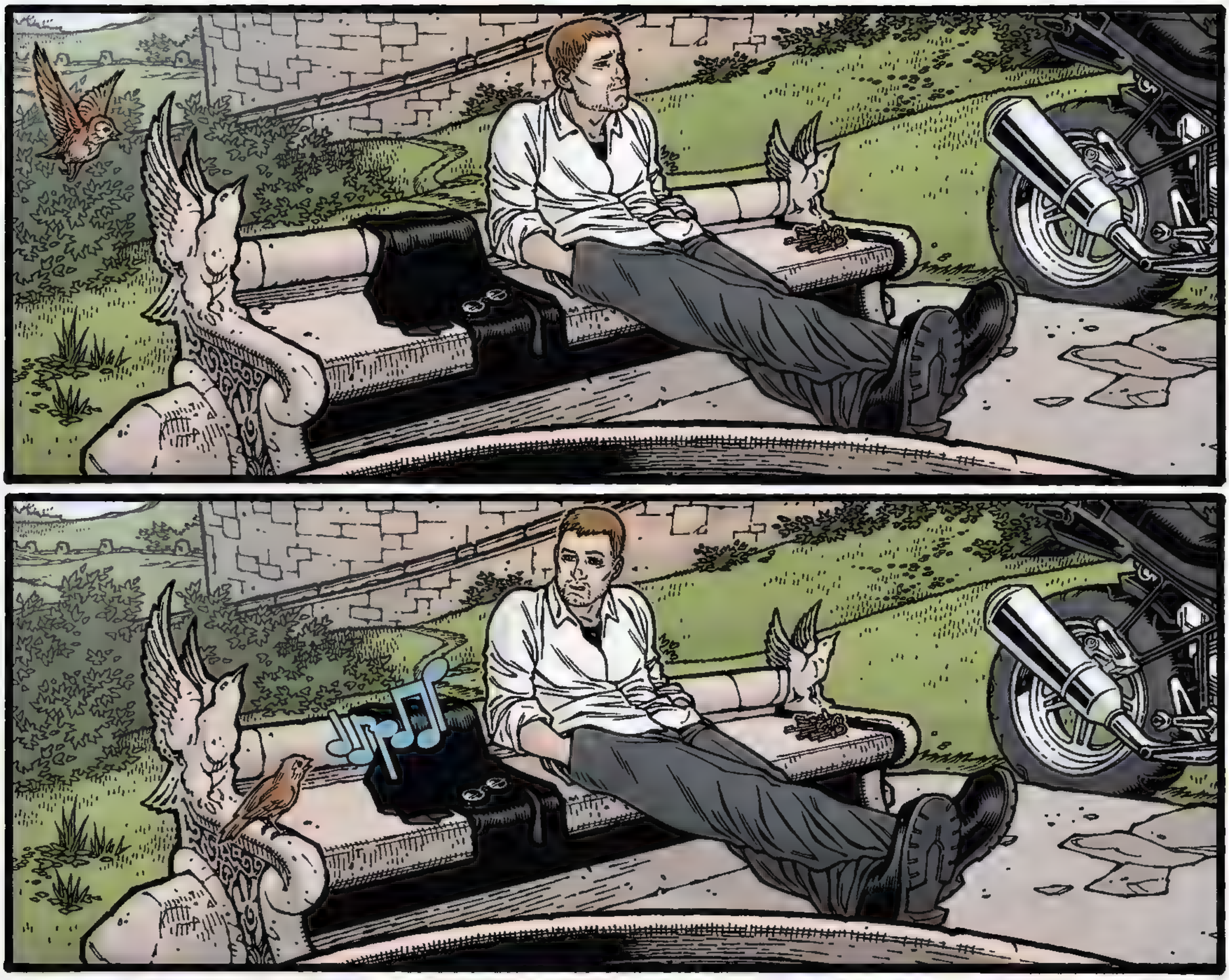
NONSENSE. JORDAN WAS A VERY OPEN PERSON. SHE HAD AN EASY FLOW—AN INHERENT GLOW OF HAPPINESS—THAT ATTRACTED PEOPLE WHEREVER SHE WENT.

SHE WAS GOING TO VASSAR NEXT FALL. SHE COULDN'T WAIT. IT WAS HER DREAM. THEY WOULD'VE TREATED HER LIKE A QUEEN. SHE WOULD'VE HAD THAT PLACE IN THE PALM OF HER...

HEY!

BRRRRMMM

MMM...



WHAT?

ARE YOU SURE?

THANK YOU. MAY YOU FLY WITH YOUR SPIRIT FLOCK FOREVER AND EVER, FRIEND. YOUR FAMILY IS OUT THERE WAITING FOR YOU. THEY NEED YOU.

AND MY FAMILY IS HERE AND THEY NEED ME.

WHAT THE—*NOW* WHERE ARE WE GOING?

OK. I GUESS.

KINSEY? YOU BETTER GET UP HERE. BRING MOM. BRING DUNCAN. BRING... EVERYONE... AND JUST... JUST GET HERE.

HI MOM!

TYLER? TY, WHO— BUH-B-B-

HOW-HOW- HOWHOWHOW- BODE! OH GOD, BODE! I THINK I'M GOING CRAZY! HOW, HOW-

OH, WELL, IT'S KINDA HARD TO EXPLAIN. SEE, THE BAD KID, ZACH, HE MADE ME INTO A GHOST A COUPLE MONTHS AGO. ONLY HE WASN'T REALLY ZACH, HE WAS THIS OTHER KID, AND ONCE HE WAS ALSO A GIRL!

BUT, ANYHOW, THERE WAS A SPARROW WHO LOST MOST OF HIS FLOCK FIGHTING EVIL DOGS—UM, ONE OF THE DOGS WAS ZACH, TOO—AND THIS LITTLE BIRD, HE WANTED TO GO LOOKING FOR HIS FAMILY IN THE SPIRIT WORLD...

YOU FOLLOWING ANY OF THIS?

I LOST HIM A LITTLE WHILE BACK.

WHEN WAS THAT?

AHHH... RIGHT AFTER HE SAID, "HI, MOM!"

AND YOU'RE YOU. AND YOU'RE HERE. AND YOU'RE ALL RIGHT.

YEAH. I AM. I'M *FINE*! REALLY! AND ZACH WILL NEVER BOTHER US AGAIN. NEVER EVER. BECAUSE OF...

...BECAUSE OF RUFUS.

YOU'RE A HERO, RUFUS. YOU STOPPED THE BAD GUY. YOU MADE HIM GO AWAY.

AND EVERYTHING'S GOING TO BE OKAY FOR *YOU*, TOO, BECAUSE YOU'RE GOING TO LIVE WITH US NOW. AND WE CAN PLAY ACTION FIGURES AND I CAN TEACH YOU ABOUT THE KEYS AND WE'LL HELP OUT WHEN DUNCAN REBUILDS THE HOUSE AND IT'LL BE GREAT. OKAY?

IS THAT ALL RIGHT, MOM?

IF RUFUS WANTS TO BE WITH US, YOU BET. DO YOU WANT TO BE WITH US, RUFUS?

AFFIRMATIVE, MA'AM. REPORTING FOR DUTY.

WHO?

DAD.

KNOCK-KNOCK.

NO MORE KNOCK-KNOCK JOKES, PLEASE. I HAVEN'T LIKED KNOCK-KNOCK JOKES SINCE I WAS SIX.

WHEN DID YOU GET SO GROWN-UP? LOOK AT THAT BEARD.

I'M SO PROUD OF YOU, KID.

I SAW YOU WHEN I WAS IN THE MEDICINE CABINET. MOM PUT ME IN THERE TO FIX ME—SEE, I HAD BEEN SHOT, AND—

I REMEMBER. I WAS THERE, YOU KNOW.

BUT—BUT, *HOW*? YOU'RE DEAD. WHAT WERE YOU DOING IN THE MEDICINE CABINET?

DEATH ISN'T THE END OF YOUR LIFE, YOU KNOW.

YOUR BODY IS A LOCK. DEATH IS THE KEY. THE KEY TURNS... AND YOU'RE FREE. TO BE ANYWHERE. EVERYWHERE. TWO PLACES AT ONCE. NOWHERE. PART OF THE BACKGROUND HUM OF THE UNIVERSE.

BUT I THINK A PART OF ME WAS PARTICULARLY ATTACHED TO THE MEDICINE CABINET. YOUR MOM PUT MY ASHES THERE AND TRIED TO FIX ME. IT WAS TOO LATE FOR MY BODY, BUT...

IT DID WONDERS FOR MY SOUL.

I HURT YOU SOMETIMES, TYLER. I SAID CRUEL THINGS. WAS TOO HARD... BECAUSE I WAS SCARED YOU'D BE LIKE ME.

BUT YOU AREN'T ANYTHING LIKE ME. YOU'RE SO MUCH BETTER.

YOU'RE THE KIND OF MAN I ALWAYS WANTED TO BE. I GUESS MY LIFE WASN'T A COMPLETE WASTE OF TIME. WHATEVER DAMAGE I DID—ALL THOSE LIVES I WRECKED BECAUSE OF MY SELFISHNESS—MY COWARDICE—

STOP IT. WHAT I SAID IN THE CABINET—I TAKE IT BACK. I DIDN'T MEAN IT.

IT TOOK A LOT OF BAD CHOICES AND BAD LUCK FOR WHAT HAPPENED TO HAPPEN. IF I HATED YOU FOR BEING EIGHTEEN AND STUPID ONCE, I'D NEVER BE ABLE TO LOOK AT MYSELF IN THE MIRROR AGAIN.

EIGHTEEN AND STUPID HAPPENS TO EVERYONE, I GUESS. IF YOU SURVIVE IT, IT'S PROBABLY HALF LUCK, AND HALF HAVING THE RIGHT PEOPLE IN YOUR LIFE TO WATCH OUT FOR YOU. PEOPLE LIKE MOM. AND DUNCAN. AND YOU.

I BROUGHT BODE BACK. WHY DON'T YOU COME BACK, TOO? I STILL NEED YOU. I CAN GET YOU OUT OF THIS PLACE, YOU KNOW, WITH THE ANYWHERE KEY. HOW ABOUT IT?

AH. WELL. IT'S A SWEET IDEA, BUT... NO.

I'M NOT DODGE. LIFE WAS A GOOD DREAM, BUT NOW I'M AWAKE. ONLY DEMONS CLING TO LIFE AFTER THEIR TIME IS UP.

YOU GO FINISH THE REST OF YOUR DREAM. I'LL STILL BE LOOKIN' OUT FOR YOU. AND I'LL BE AROUND WHEN IT'S OVER. GIVE MY LOVE TO YOUR MOM FOR ME.

ΩLPHA
PART 2 - THE END
Editor: CHRIS RYALL • Letterer: ROBBIE ROBBINS • Colorist: JAY FOTOS
Storytellers: JOE HILL & GABRIEL RODRIGUEZ
LOCKE & KEY created by Gabriel Rodríguez & Joe Hill

THE KEEPERS OF THE KEYS -

"TAMERS OF THE TEMPEST"

JAY FOTOS

ROBBIE ROBBINS

CHRIS RYALL

TED ADAMS

GREG GOLDSTEIN

MARCI HUBBARD

DIRK WOOD

JUSTIN EISINGER

LORELEI BUNJES

ETHAN, AIDAN & RYAN
The Hill Kids

CATALINA GRIFFIN

JOSÉ MANUEL, MATÍAS & BENJAMÍN (t)
The Rodriguez Kids

CHRISTINA TERRY

SKYLAR, SARAH & JESSE
The L&K Kids

GABRIEL & MARIA EUGENIA

STEPHEN & TABITHA

ISRAEL & KATHRYN SKELTON

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DAVID PETERSEN

MATT FRACTION

RALPH DIBERNARDO

KATE LETH

MIGUEL FERRADA

BLAIR BUTLER

ALEX, PETE & JUSTIN

EVERYONE WHO READ THE THING

ALL THE RETAILERS WHO EMBRACED L&K (AND OTHER INDIE COMICS)

EVERY COMIC WRITER & ARTIST (OUR TEACHERS)

THANKS!

JOE & GABRIEL

EXETER / SANTIAGO

OCTOBER, 2013

THE REAL LOVECRAFT, MASS

In 2007, *Locke & Key* artist Gabriel Rodriguez created the visual map for Lovecraft, MA, based on Joe Hill's descriptions and some photo reference. Gabriel made the town an integral part of the story's visuals. Lovecraft might be a fictional place but its look and location were based on real haunts in Massachusettes. Even the book's "Drowning Cave" was based on a real landmark, "Swallow Cave" in Nahant, Mass.

In August 2013, following a successful appearance at the Boston Comic-Con, Gabriel was able to see these locations in person for the first time. Joe Hill led an expedition in and around Nahant so Gabriel, along with Editor Chris Ryall, keymaker extraordinaire Israel Skelton, writer Jason Ciaramella, *Wraith* artist Charles P. Wilson III, and photographer Shane Leonard, could visit the book's actual locations.

All photos for the following photo essay are by Shane Leonard unless otherwise noted.

This Page: Old-time photo of Nahant, MA next to Gabriel's Lovecraft, MA

Joe and Gabriel with the Giant Key in Nahant, MA

Gabriel ensures that *Locke & Key* could live on another day

Joe and Izzy Skelton, sitting on the rock of the bay

Chris Ryall and Joe Hill

Joe and Gabriel sit on rocks that Gabriel has been drawing for years

And this time, Gabriel was nowhere in sight...

Izzy Skelton and Gabriel share a laugh

The entrance to Swallow Cave,
the model for the Drowning Cave

The Omega Key. That damned Omega Key

Joe and Gabriel inside "the Drowning Cave"

Joe prays this day ends better for him than the "Cave Rave" in his comic

Joe and Gabriel at the crossroads of "Drowning Cave Road"

The writer in repose

If you didn't like the ending of this series, well...

Actual Swallow Cave and *Locke & Key*'s Drowning Cave

Chris Ryall, Joe Hill, and Gabriel Rodriguez at the mouth of the cave

Album art if Joe, Gabe and Chris ever form a Nickleback cover band

Chris and Gabriel find inspiration in Joe's Reading Room, complete with Locke & Key rug

Gabriel and Chris use the Ghost Key to open Joe's working Ghost Door

After 45 issues of *Locke & Key*, Gabriel earns the sweet release the Ghost Door offers.

Exiting the cave...
for now.

JOE HILL'S

WRAITH

WELCOME TO CHRISTMASLAND

JOE HILL
AND
CHARLES PAUL WILSON III
TELL A TERRIFYING STORY OF ATONEMENT AND ESCAPE, SET IN THE *NEW YORK TIMES* BESTSELLING NOVEL *NOS4A2*'S NIGHTMARISH AMUSEMENT PARK... CHRISTMASLAND!

THIS ORIGINAL NEW COMIC MINISERIES ARRIVES ON SALE NOW. MERRY CHRISTMAS!

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"MY FATHER WAS A LOW RASCAL WHO LEFT ME NOTHING BUT MY NAME AND WAS SHOT OVER A WOMAN WHO I REGRET TO SAY WAS NOT MY MOTHER.

"HE DIED IN THE ARMS OF A FAT LADY NAMED SALLY GRAPEFRUITS AND SHE WAS CALLING HIM A FOOL AS HIS LIFE TRICKLED AWAY BETWEEN HIS FINGERS!

"SUCH IS THE FATE OF THE FAITHLESS MAN! TO DIE IN THE GRIP OF AN ABUSIVE FAT WOMAN AND WAKE IN THE EMBRACE OF SATAN!

SCRIBBLED BY
JOE HILL
DRAWN BY
CHARLES "TALENT" WILSON THE III
SPELT JUST RIGHT BY
SHAWN LEE & ROBBIE ROBBINS
PAINTED PRETTY BY
JAY FOTOS
THREATS AND DEMANDS ISSUED BY
CHRIS RYALL
WRAITH NUMERO UNO
PROLOG: FANTOMS

"SOME WOMEN ARE BORN TO BE MOTHERS, BUT I AM AFRAID FANNY MANX WAS NOT THE MATERNAL SORT! OH, SHE DID WHAT SHE COULD TO EARN FOR US, WORKING AS A HOUSEMAID IN PORTIS AND MCMURTRY'S INN AND MORTUARY.

"I WILL SAY OUR MOUTHS NEVER WENT EMPTY!

"IT WAS NO EASY LIFE IN A ONE-WHORE TOWN—AHEM, ONE-HORSE, I MEAN TO SAY—LIKE CRIPPLE CREEK, AND MY MOTHER WAS BITTER ABOUT OUR LOT. WHEN FANNY WAS IN HER CUPS, SHE WOULD BLAME ME FOR ALL MISFORTUNES AND COULD BE QUITE CRUEL.

"SHE WOULD CALL ME THE BAT-FACED BOY AND TELL ME BABIES ARE VAMPIRES, AND WHEN THEY SUCK AT THE BREAST, THEY ARE REALLY DRAINING A WOMAN'S YOUTH. SHE SAID IT SERVED ME RIGHT I SLEPT IN A COFFIN—IT WAS WHERE I BELONGED!

"MR. PORTIS AND MR. McMURTRY HAD AN INGENIOUS BUSINESS MODEL, YOU SEE. IN THE FRONT ROOM, THE MINERS AND ROUSTABOUTS COULD DRINK THEMSELVES TO DEATH.

"IN THE BACK ROOM, THEIR NEXT OF KIN COULD SELECT A COFFIN AND ONE OF SEVERAL AFFORDABLE FUNERAL SERVICES!

"SO IT'S TRUE, I HAD A COFFIN OF MY OWN AND SLEPT IN IT EVERY NIGHT. IT SOUNDS MACABRE, BUT BELIEVE ME, I HAD THE QUIETEST ROOM IN THE WHOLE INN AND THE ONLY BED THAT WAS NOT FULL OF LICE!

"I MADE A LITTLE COIN BY DRIVING MR. McMURTRY'S HORSE-DRAWN HEARSE IN THE PROCESSIONS TO THE CEMETERY. IT WAS MY FIRST JOB. I HAVE ALWAYS BEEN A DRIVER.

"MY MOTHER KEPT THE MONEY I EARNED FOR HERSELF, BUT ON CHRISTMAS, AT LEAST, SHE WOULD LET ME SPEND A LITTLE ON SOMETHING I WANTED."

"SANTA CLAUS NEVER BROUGHT ME ANYTHING, AND IF HE HAD EVER COME DOWN MY CHIMNEY, I WOULD'VE BEGGED HIM NOT FOR TOYS, BUT A RIDE AWAY FROM THAT PLACE.

"I WAS USED TO ICE AND DARKNESS FROM A CHILDHOOD IN COLORADO AND A NORTH POLE FILLED WITH TOYS AND HAPPY ELVES SOUNDED LIKE AN IMPROVEMENT ON CRIPPLE CREEK.

GLAAAAH!

"THE FANTOM WAS MY GIFT TO MYSELF. IT RAN ON RAZOR BLADES AND WAS THE LOVELY BLACK OF A WIDOW'S SILKS. THE BEST GIFTS ARE NEVER GIVEN, BUT CLAIMED. REMEMBER THAT, CHILD. TAKE THAT TO HEART."

WELL! IF WE HAVE REACHED A DAY WHEN AN INDIAN CAN LAY HANDS ON A WHITE MAN WITH IMPUNITY, I DO NOT HOLD OUT MUCH HOPE FOR THE FUTURE OF OUR NATION!

YOU COME BACK IN AGAIN, I DO NOT HOLD OUT MUCH HOPE FOR *YOUR* FUTURE, STANTON. MR. McMURTRY CAN'T HAVE YOU ABUSING THE STAFF.

YOU THINK YOU CAN KICK ME OUT OF MY OWN BED, KICK ME TO THE FLOOR, JUST LIKE YOU WAS KICKING A *DOG*? JUST LIKE A GODDAMN DOG?

THAT WHORE OWES ME! SHE WAS PAID AND SHE OWES! I AIN'T HAD SATISFACTION!

THAT MAKES TWO OF US, YOU LIMP-DICK SISSY!

IF YOU PAY FOR A HOSS, THE SELLER AIN'T TO BLAME IF YOU CAN'T GET IN THE SADDLE. MAYBE YOU SHOULD NOT DRINK SO MUCH NEXT TIME... OR MAYBE A WOMAN ISN'T WHAT YOU WANT.

"THEY DO NOT MAKE SLEDS TODAY LIKE THEY MADE THEM THEN AND THEY HAVE NEVER MADE THEM LIKE THE FANTOM. I KNEW EVEN BEFORE I GOT ON IT...

"...THAT IT WAS FAST ENOUGH TO FLY ME OUT OF THIS WORLD AND INTO ANOTHER.

"THE FANTOM WAS FAST ENOUGH TO MAKE SNOWMEN TURN THEIR HEADS AND GAPE."

"AT SOME POINT, I NOTICED THE SKY WASN'T RIGHT. HAD LOST ITS PROPER FORM. I DIDN'T UNDERSTAND IT THEN. I ONLY PARTLY UNDERSTAND IT NOW.

"MY FANTOM HAD CUT A HOLE BETWEEN THE OUTER WORLD AND MY INNER WORLD OF THOUGHT, BRINGING THE TWO TOGETHER. THAT CURIOUS, BUZZING SKY WAS... MY BEWILDERMENT. A ZONE OF UNFORMED THOUGHT, SPILLING INTO REALITY.

"MAGIC IS NOT A MATTER OF INCANTATIONS AND BOILED FROGS! YOU REQUIRE ONLY A TALISMAN—AN OBJECT—THAT YOU LOVE SO MUCH IT IS LIKE A DREAM MADE REAL.

"AND SPEED. SPEED, THE SCIENTISTS HAVE SHOWED, SLOWS TIME, DISTORTS PARTICLES, AND CAUSES REALITY TO GROW INSECURE. I WILL TAKE SPEED OVER EYE OF NEWT ANY DAY.

"BUT I KNEW NONE OF THIS THEN, ONLY THAT SOMETHING HAD HAPPENED. THEN THE MAN STANTON APPEARED, THE ONE I HAD SEEN THROWN INTO THE STREET, AND WHATEVER WAS HAPPENING STOPPED."

YOU'RE THE MANX BOY. HEY, BOY. YOUR MOTHER OWES ME FOR SERVICES SHE AIN'T RENDERED. BILL STANTON IS A MAN WHO EXPECTS TO GET WHAT HE PAID FOR... ONE WAY OR T'OTHER.

"I WILL SPARE YOU THE DETAILS OF WHAT HAPPENED NEXT. THEY ARE UNSPEAKABLE. I WILL ONLY SAY THAT HELL ITSELF IS NOT HOT ENOUGH FOR SOME MEN!"

YOUR MOMMA COULD PICK UP SOME POINTERS FROM YOU, KID. YOUR MOMMA... HEY. HEY. WHERE YOU THINK YOU'RE GOING? I'M TALKIN' TO YOU.

"I THOUGHT ONLY OF ESCAPE.

"I NEVER SAW THE TREE."

BOY! WAKE UP, KID! THE SKY! THERE'S SOMETHING HAPPENING TO THE SKY!

TO BE CONTINUED IN WRAITH #1, ON SALE NOW!

Wishing you a happy holiday from all the members of Empire.